

CAROL MACKINNON

IQ: 57 TRAINABLE

"No", she screamed as she slapped me across the face.

"Carol-ol Mc-Kin-non", I spoke softly, pausing between every syllable. "Since you don't want to help clear the table, you can stay and help set up the entire dining room."

"No!"

"Carol, I don't like punishing you, but you don't hit people when you're angry. You talk to them."

"No! No!"

"Carol, you're staying to help clear the dining room. Go get your pail and cloth."

Since Carol realized she was fighting a never ending battle, she quietly got up and went to get the necessary equipment to clean the tables.

Carol is a nineteen year old girl-child with a common abnormality - or so it's stated. It's called mental retardation and, in her case, a specific title - 'Down's Syndrome'. Carol has been institutionalized for fourteen of her nineteen years. Her parents didn't want her at home. They were getting on in years and the 'diseased' child - sent to them by God for punishment - wasn't accepted by them or the community.

Carol spent her early years in a childrens' unit until she reached the age of sixteen. She was then classified as a 'Trainable III' and, therefore, rehabilitation material. She was toilet trained - an important aspect for rehab. - took moderate care of herself, and had a large vocabulary, but rarely communicated with other individuals.

It was there on Rehab that I first met Carol. Our first encounter took place when my supervisor asked me to find Carol and escort her to school. She was sitting in the locker room, directly across from the mirror, banging her head against the wall.

"Carol, you bad girl, you're supposed to be in school. You naughty girl. You go to your room", she kept repeating, before I had even spoken. She quietly got up and walked to school. Not with me, but four or five yards ahead of me. She neither answered any of my questions nor looked at me directly. Carol's concentration span at this time was less than thirty seconds when dealing with another individual.

As time went on, I grew very close to this young girl. She acted, always, as if I was non-existent. In her world. I was.

Prior to Carol's institutionalization, she spent most of her time at home locked in her room. She developed an acute imagination and a strong attachment to her image in the mirror. She was driven in a car to the institution by her parents. She developed a fear of any vehicle. A vehicle to her meant banishment of her basic essential needs. She spent thirteen years at Mountain Side without ever leaving the premises.

At the end of the first summer that I worked with her, with the doctor's permission and two tablets of valium, we took Carol for her first car ride in thirteen years. Similar to most mongoloids, Carol loved food. Logically then, we took her to MacDonald's. The entire trip she kept repeating, "When we going back. Want to go home." Carol had her first Big Mac, chocolate shake, and french fries in the peaceful sanctuary of her room.

It was always difficult to attract Carol's attention so, after many failures of different methods, I found one that succeeded. When Carol was watching a program on television, I threw a pillow at her. She ignored me. I threw another. She ignored me again. I threw another. She threw it back at me and we had a full fledged pillow fight. Carol smiled and laughed. When the realization came to her that she'd broken a barrier - stepped out of her 'world' - she abruptly turned around and resumed watching television - face expressionless.

My summer employment was terminated in August and I returned to school. Carol McKinnon was frequently on my mind.

The second summer I worked with Carol she had improved considerably. One thing that really surprised me was that, after nine months, she had remembered not just me, but, my first and last name. The little girl who had never called me by name - never spoken to me directly - knew me. Carol's concentration span had increased to fifteen minutes and sometimes longer with different activities. She was a member of a square dancing class, shopped downtown and attended various other facilities provided for the mentally and physically handicapped.

Carol was friendly with the staff now, but still rarely associated with her fellow residents.

I took Carol downtown to shop one day at Eatons and, after an hour, she was extremely tired and cranky. We had to walk up two flights of stairs before we reached the woman's department. In the middle of the second flight of stairs, Carol let out a loud scream. I screamed. She was shocked and continued walking up the stairs. We had a peaceful trip from then on.

We grew closer as the summer went on, however not close enough for Carol to allow me into her 'world'. We devised a little game. In layman's terms - reversal of roles. "Carol, I don't want to clear the tables", I'd say. She'd pat me on the rear and in a truly commanding voice tell me how bad I was and that, if I failed to do what I was told, I'd be punished.

By the time the summer came to a close, Carol asked me for help in certain things like washing and curling her hair, to take her to the Dairy Queen and other such activities.

On my last day of work, I searched for Carol and could not locate her. I didn't get a chance to say good-bye.

I received a letter a few weeks ago from a young handicapped boy I had also worked with.

He informed me that Carol is now living in a group home in town. My little girl has grown. My heart will always be with her.

